

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6485
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3962

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IS, US
SUBJECT: HERUT SPOKESMAN ON COALITION TALKS AND ARAB-ISRAELI
NEGOTIATIONS

REF: TEL AVIV 3801

BEGIN SUMMARY: ELIAHU BEN-ELISSAR, HERUT SPOKESMAN AND
KEADING CANDIDATE TO BE BEGIN'S DIRECTOR GENERAL, HAS
PROVIDED EMBASSY WITH ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ISRAELI
SCENE AND BROAD OUTLINE OF LIKUD'S APPROACH TO ARAB-
ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. HIGHLIGHTS ARE:
A) BEGIN WILL SUCCEED IN FORMING LIKUD-NRP-DMC COALITION
WITHIN SEVERAL WEEKS; B) BEGIN WILL GO TO GENEVA CON-
FERENCE ONLY WITH ORIGINAL PARTICIPANTS; C) NEGOTIATIONS
SHOULD FOCUS INITIALLY ON "EASIER PROBLEMS" SUCH AS
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REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT; D) IN CONTRAST TO THE PREVIOUS
GOVERNMENT, LIKUD IS AGAINST PARTIAL AGREEMENTS
INVOLVING AMBIGUOUS ARAB CONCESSIONS (A PEICE OF
TERRITORY FOR A PIECE OF PEACE); AND E) A LIKUD
GOVERNMENT WILL NOT SEEK LIGITIMATION OF ISRAEL'S
RIGHT TO EXIST FROM THE ARABS. END SUMMARY

1. AS A FOLLOW-ON TO OUR EARLIER DISCUSSION (REFTEL), ELIAHU BEN-ELISSAR, SPOKESMAN FOR THE HERUT PARTY, DISCUSSED WITH US JUNE 2 THE PROSPECT FOR FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT, THE LIKUD VIEW OF U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS AND ITS GENERAL APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS. BEN-ELISSAR IS WIDELY REGARDED AS THE LEADING CANDIDATE TO REPLACE AMOS EIRAN AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. WE BELIEVE HIS ASSESSMENT PROVIDES VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO LIKUD THINKING AND ITS DIFFERENCES FROM THE LABOR ALIGNMENT.

2. ISRAELI POLITICS. BEN-ELISSAR SAID HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT BEGIN WOULD SUCCEED IN FORMING A GOVERNMENT INCLUDING THE LIKUD, THE DMC, THE NRP AND PROBABLY THE AGUDAH PARTIES WITHIN TWO TO THREE WEEKS. THE 72-77 MEMBER COALITION WOULD BE ONE OF THE STRONGEST ISRAEL HAS ENJOYED IN MANY YEARS WITH CONSIDERABLE COHESION AND STABILITY. DAYAN DEFINITELY WILL BE THE FOREIGN MINISTER WHILE YADIN WOULD BE OFFERED THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN THE INNER CABINET (THE LATTER POINT IS CONFIRMED IN TODAY'S PRESS). DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIKUD AND THE DMC ON FOREIGN POLICY AND ELECTION REFORM, HE SAID, SHOULD NOT CONSTITUTE OBSTACLES TO FORMING A COALITION. MOST, IF NOT ALL OF THE DMC, WOULD BE ABLE TO REACH A MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE LIKUD. (EMBASSY IS COMMENTING ON LIKUD-DMC FOREIGN POLICY DIFFERENCES AS A FACTOR IN COALITION TALKS SEPTTEL.)

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3. BEGIN'S HEALTH. BEN-ELISSAR DOWNPLAYED BEGIN'S CURRENT MEDICAL PROBLEMS AS A FACTOR IN FORMING THE NEW GOVERNMENT OR RUNNING IT EFFECTIVELY. HIS MENTAL VIGOR AND INTELLECTUAL POWERS WERE UNCHANGED. WHILE HE HAD TO REST IN THE AFTERNOONS, HE WAS PHYSICALLY CAPABLE OF MEETING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP.

4. U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. BEGIN WILL DO ALL IN HIS POWER TO ESTABLISH A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. WE WOULD COME TO APPRECIATE THE GREATER CLARITY, CANDOR, AND SINCERITY OF THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT IN CONTRAST WITH ITS PREDECESSORS. EVEN IF THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS, EACH SIDE WOULD KNOW CLEARLY WHERE IT STOOD. BEN-ELISSAR ACKNOWLEDGED THAT BEGIN'S EMISSARY TO THE U.S., SHMUEL KATZ, HAD ENCOUNTERED DIFFICULTIES IN SEEKING TO PERSUADE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS OF THE LIKUD APPROACH TO TERRITORIAL ISSUES. BUT WHY, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY, SHOULD SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN

BE FIRMER ABOUT ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO THE WEST BANK
THAN MEIR, RABIN AND PERES HAD BEEN? THE LIKUD
WOULD DO ITS BEST TO EXPLAIN ITS APPROACH TO THESE
ISSUES IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.

5. ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. BEGIN WAS FULLY PRE-
PARED TO GO TO A GENEVA CONFERENCE BEFORE THE END
OF 1977. THE PARTICIPANTS WOULD HAVE TO BE ONLY THOSE
WHO PARTICIPATED IN DECEMBER 1973. (BEN-ELISSAR
ADDED CAUSTICALLY THAT THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THAT
FIRST SESSION HAD BEEN TO ASSURE MEIR'S RE-ELECTION.)
THE LIKUD REJECTS PLO PARTICIPATION. THERE IS NO
PURPOSE IN SEEKING FORMULAS TO BRING THEM IN BY THE
BACK DOOR. AGREEMENT TO GO TO A GENEVA CONFERENCE
IN ITSELF CONSTITUTED A CONCESSION SINCE LIKUD PREFERS
DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND ARABS WITHOUT
THE MEDIATION OF THE UN, THE U.S. OR THE USSR. IN
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ORDER TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM OF NEGOTIATIONS ALIVE,
HOWEVER, IT WAS WILLING TO CEDE THIS POINT.

6. AS TO THE CONTENT OF NEGOTIATIONS, BEN-ELISSAR
SUGGESTED THAT AN EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO IDENTIFY
"THE EASIER PROBLEMS" RATHER THAN TRYING IMMEDIATELY
TO ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE WEST BANK
AND JERUSALEM. THE LIKUD WAS NOT INTERESTED
IN REPEATING THE MISTAKE OF THE POST-1973 AGREEMENTS
IN WHICH ISRAEL SURRENDERED TERRITORIES IN EXCHANGE
FOR AMBIGUOUS ARAB POLITICAL COMMITMENTS. IT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3962

DOES NOT WANT TO NEGOTIATE "A PIECE OF TERRITORY
FOR A PIECE OF PEACE." AN INITIAL TOPIC OF
NEGOTIATIONS MIGHT BE A HUMANITARIAN SOLUTION OF THE
REFUGEE PROBLEM. ISRAEL WOULD BE READY TO OFFER TO
RESETTLE REFUGEES IN CAMPS UNDER ITS CONTROL AND
WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE ARABS DO LIKEWISE IN LEBANON
AND JORDAN.

7. ISRAEL'S LEGITIMACY AND THE ARABS. THE LIKUD, IN
CONTRAST TO THE ALIGNMENT, DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT A
MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF NEGOTIATIONS OUGHT TO BE ARAB
RECOGNITION OF THE LEGITIMACY OF ISRAEL AS A JEWISH
STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. (NOTE: THIS INDEED HAS
BEEN A MAIN THEME OF THE ALIGNMENT FOR MANY YEARS.)
ISRAEL'S LEGITIMACY, HE CONTINUES, DOES NOT DEPEND
ON THE ARABS AT ALL. IT COMES FROM JEWISH HISTORY
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AND THE INHERENT RIGHT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO RETURN
TO THEIR HOMELAND. THUS, THE U.S. SHOULD NOT REGARD
ARAB RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL'S LEGITIMACY AS A CON-
CESSION FOR WHICH THE LIKUD WOULD TRADE TERRITORIES.
THE ISSUE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARABS IS THE CONCEPT
AND TERMS OF PEACE, NOT ISRAEL'S LEGITIMACY. ON THIS SCORE,
BEN-ELISSAR SAID THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE ARAB OBJECTIVE
REMAINED THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL, FIRST BY PUSHING IT
BACK TO THE 1967 BORDERS AND THEN WHITTILING IT DOWN
FURTHER. THE ARAB VIEW OF ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE
AND THE LIKUD WOULD DO WHAT IT COULD TO SHOW HOW
THIS MIGHT BE DONE. THIS IS WHY BEGIN FELT IT WAS
IMPORTANT TO MEET ARAB LEADERS FACE TO FACE TO
EXPLAIN THE ISRAELI CASE IN UNEQUIVOCAL AND CLEAR
TERMS.

8. COMMENT: MUCH OF BEN-ELISSAR'S EXPOSITION IS
QUINTESSENTIAL BEGIN PHILOSOPHY INCLUDING THE
ASSERTION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S INTRINSIC RIGHT TO

THE LAND OF ISRAEL. THE EMPHASIS ON THE NON-NEGOTIABILITY OF ISRAEL'S LEGITIMACY STRIKES US AS A SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM THE ALIGNMENT APPROACH (EVEN THOUGH THE LATTER ALSO HAS NO SELF-DOUBT ABOUT NATIONAL LEGITIMACY). IN EFFECT, HOWEVER, THE LIKUD APPROACH WOULD REMOVE A BARGAINING CHIP FROM THE PATTERN OF NEGOTIATIONS AND IS ONE OF A NUMBER OF INDICATIONS THAT THE LIKUD POSTURE WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY TOUGHER THAN THAT OF THE PRECEDING LABOR-LED GOVERNMENTS. BEN-ELISSAR CAREFULLY AVOIDED DISCUSSING PARTICULARS--E.G., BORDERS--AND MADE CLEAR HE WAS SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF AND NOT FOR BEGIN. NONETHELESS, WE BELIEVE THESE VIEWS PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT INSIGHTS INTO BEGIN'S BROAD APPROACH. WHETHER IT WILL BE TEMPERED BY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING PRIME MINISTER AND THE NECESSITY OF DEALING WITH COALITION PARTNERS WITH SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT VIEWS REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
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